

# **ALEXANDER AND BUCEPHALUS**

[309] ALEXANDER, the son of Philip of Macedon, became king in 336 B.C. The queen-mother adored her brave son and dreamed of the great things he would do when he became a man. She did all she could to awake his ambition, telling him that he was descended from Achilles, the hero of Troy, and bidding him, when he was older, strive to do nobler deeds than his great ancestor had done. One of his tutors called the young prince Achilles, while he named himself Phoenix, after the tutor of the old Greek hero.

The Iliad of Homer, which tells of the deeds of Achilles, Alexander knew by heart. When he was a man he always carried a copy with him on his campaigns. It is said that he slept with it as well as his sword beneath his pillow.

Alexander might almost have been a Spartan boy, so simple was his training. He learned to ride, to race, to swim, but he never cared to wrestle as did most lads of his time. Nor would he offer prizes for such contests at the games which were held each year.

When the prince was asked if he would run in the Olympic games, for he was fleet of foot, he answered, "Yes, if I could have kings to race with me."

Even as a lad he was eager to win glory, and when he heard of a great victory gained by his royal father, or of a town that had been subdued by him, he was more sorry than glad, and said to his companions, "My father will make so many conquests that there will be nothing left for me to win."

[310] One day, while Alexander was still a boy, a Greek from Thessaly arrived at the court of Macedon, bringing with him a noble horse, named Bucephalus, which he offered to sell for £2600.

Philip went with his son and his courtiers to look at the horse and to test its powers. But when any one approached or tried to mount, Bucephalus reared and kicked, and became so unmanageable that the king, growing angry, bade the Thessalian take the animal away.

The prince had been watching the horse keenly, and as he was being led away, the lad exclaimed, "What an excellent horse do they lose for want of skill and courage to manage him!"

Philip heard what his son said, but at first he took no notice of his words. But when the prince said the same thing again and again, he looked at Alexander, and saw that he was really sorry that the horse was being sent away.

Then, half mocking, the king said, "Do you reproach those who are older than yourself, as if you knew more and were better able to manage him than they?"

"I could manage the horse better than others have done," answered the prince.

"And if you fail what will you forfeit?" asked the king.

"I will pay the whole price of the horse," said Alexander quickly.

The courtiers laughed at the confidence of the prince, but paying no attention to them, he ran toward the horse and seizing the bridle turned Bucephalus, so that he faced the sun. For the prince had noticed that the steed was afraid of his own shadow as it flitted backward and forward with his every movement.



After speaking quietly to the horse and patting him, the prince flung aside the mantle he was wearing, and nimbly mounted on his back. Using neither whip nor spur, he let the animal choose his own pace. And Bucephalus was content to go at a quiet trot.

[311] Gradually Alexander urged him on to a gallop, with voice and spur. As the pace grew quicker and quicker, the king looked on in fear lest the lad should be thrown. But when he saw that the horse was well under control, and that Alexander had turned and was coming back, he burst into tears of joy, while the courtiers loudly applauded the prince.

As he leaped from the horse, Philip kissed him and said, "O my son, look thee out a kingdom equal to and worthy of thyself, for Macedon is too little for thee."

Soon after this the king sent for a famous philosopher, named Aristotle, to teach his son.

Alexander was quick to learn, and his eager interest in his studies pleased Aristotle. In after days, when the prince had become king and was adding kingdom after kingdom to his possessions, he wrote to his old tutor, "I assure you I had rather excel others in the knowledge of what is excellent than in the extent of my power and dominions."

When Philip was murdered, Alexander was twenty years of age, "a stripling," Demosthenes said, making light of his youth. But had Demosthenes known the character of the prince, he would not have spoken thus slightly of his years.

The orator not only rejoiced when Philip was murdered, but he urged the people to rouse themselves and throw off the yoke of Macedon. The old days when the Athenians would not listen to Demosthenes were long past. Now his matchless eloquence could hold them spellbound, even when they refused to be guided by his advice. But in Athens, as in many other cities, discontent had long been smoldering, and fanned by his words it broke out into a blaze.

The young king found that he must put down rebellion in Greece before he set out, as he wished to do, to conquer Persia.